THE ROCKET'S BLAST

Special number 7

THE END OF AN ERA

FIGHTING HERO COMICS

Special Edition No. 1

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THE HOSE APPEARS TO FANTASTICALLY ASSUME THE SHAPE OF A DEADLY BOA CONSTRICTOR!

THE END OF AN ERA

BY WILLIAM PARENTE

" And so we sit
Twiddling our thoughts
Into fingers of disinterest
Listening with careless heed
To an era's final whimper"

PARENTE

One afternoon in the early part of 1952, I had completed my usual after school stop at the corner candy store finding myself as always directly in front of the comic book section. My eyes passed back and forth across the rows of neatly stacked books while I eagerly fingered the shiny quarter in my trouser pocket. As I glanced from row to row, suddenly from behind a glossy cover I noticed a stranger shining back at me. I had never seen it previously so plucking it from it's hiding place, I first scanned the cover and then began leafing through the pages. By the time I had closed the cover, tucked it under my arm and handed my twobit piece across the counter, little did I realize that I had just boarded the bandwagon of what was to become one of the most unique eras in the annals of comicdom history. The title of the first book which left upon me such a lasting impression was WEIRD SCIENCE and in the top, right hand corner emblemine the letters EC were the words "Entertaining Comics"

In those days even as now it was my opinion that EC should have stood for "Extraordinary Comic" since, in essence, it truly was the product of pure genius. Up to the very introduction of the term "New Trend," the comic scene had become a cluttered menagerie of sadly inferior material that hardly presented much challenge to the avid reader. Many titles had fallen under the supposition that simply their very nature of being a "comic" released them from the necessity of devoting anything more than a grammar school effort to their publications.

This was not to say that all companies were devoid of honest attempts to produce well drawn, cleverly written books, but there were such isolated cases that a continuous turnover of quality and ingenuity simply did not exist. In many instances, excellent examples of story and art were punctuated, with companion efforts that fell far short of the standards the better material exemplified. Comic "houses" seemed to be emptine a dynasty on the labor of a minority of under-appreciated, over-worked, professional personel. The comicade lineup was becoming an intellectual insult rather than experience since companies had projected a panorama of shallow insight, so signifigant of noteriety, onto the screen of the comic book cinema. Yet despite these critical reviews, no one felt an industrial face-lifting could be based on a market saturation of inadequate material. No one that is with the possible exception of W.M. Gaines, the senior editor and owner of the I.C. Publishing Co. from whose nest was to hatch the eagle of the "New Trend." He successfully recognized the one outstanding factor that literally exploded EC into the hearts of fandom; the need for a more "adult" approach to the industry.

Wasn't it true that not only had the business of journalistic humor grown, but more important that its' readers were growing UP? Wasn't it plausible to assume that youngsters as well as adults were no longer thinking in the same patterns fabricated ten years earlier? Wasn't it a fact that the more competitive an item became, the more the necessity arose for its improvement? This in itself should have been sufficient motivation for the industry to intebsify the quality of its format, yet there continued to remain that failure to adjust to the growth of the child's imagination through the realization that what had been unique in the past, was now present day hieroglyphics. Instead of pursuing the appetites of a new generation with fresh food for thought, publishers

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were still feeding them left-overs of stale outdated material. It was obvious the market was strangling in a tangle of mass production that was geared pitifully beneath the level of the critically comic-minded adolescent. EC felt this to be an opportune moment to rebel and re-adjust to the development of an "adult" line of comics, intelligently devised, yet still orientated to satisfy the fantasy demands of a juvenescense. With compass in hand they embarked upon an adventure that blazed across the wilderness of comicville for five great years, burning the name of EC into legend.

The "NEW TREND" as it was baptised was born of what became the last issue of the then current WAR AGAINST CRIME. The ingredients of this final issue as well as a pilot story in the subsequent pre-trend issue of INTERNATIONAL CRIME PATROL, had already begun to fortell the direction in which EC was moving. Issue #11 of WAR AGAINST CRIME closed the door on one era and opened it on another with issue #12 of VAULT OF HORROR, usually considered the first "NEW TREND" title. This was immediately joined by THE CRYPT OF TERROR, THE HAUNT OF FEAR, WEIRD SCIENCE, and WEIRD FANTASY all of which were re-vamps of earlier titles. Six months later in October of 1950, CRIME SUSPENSE branched from the VAULT OF HORROR tree adding a sixth member to the now rapidly sprouted acorn.

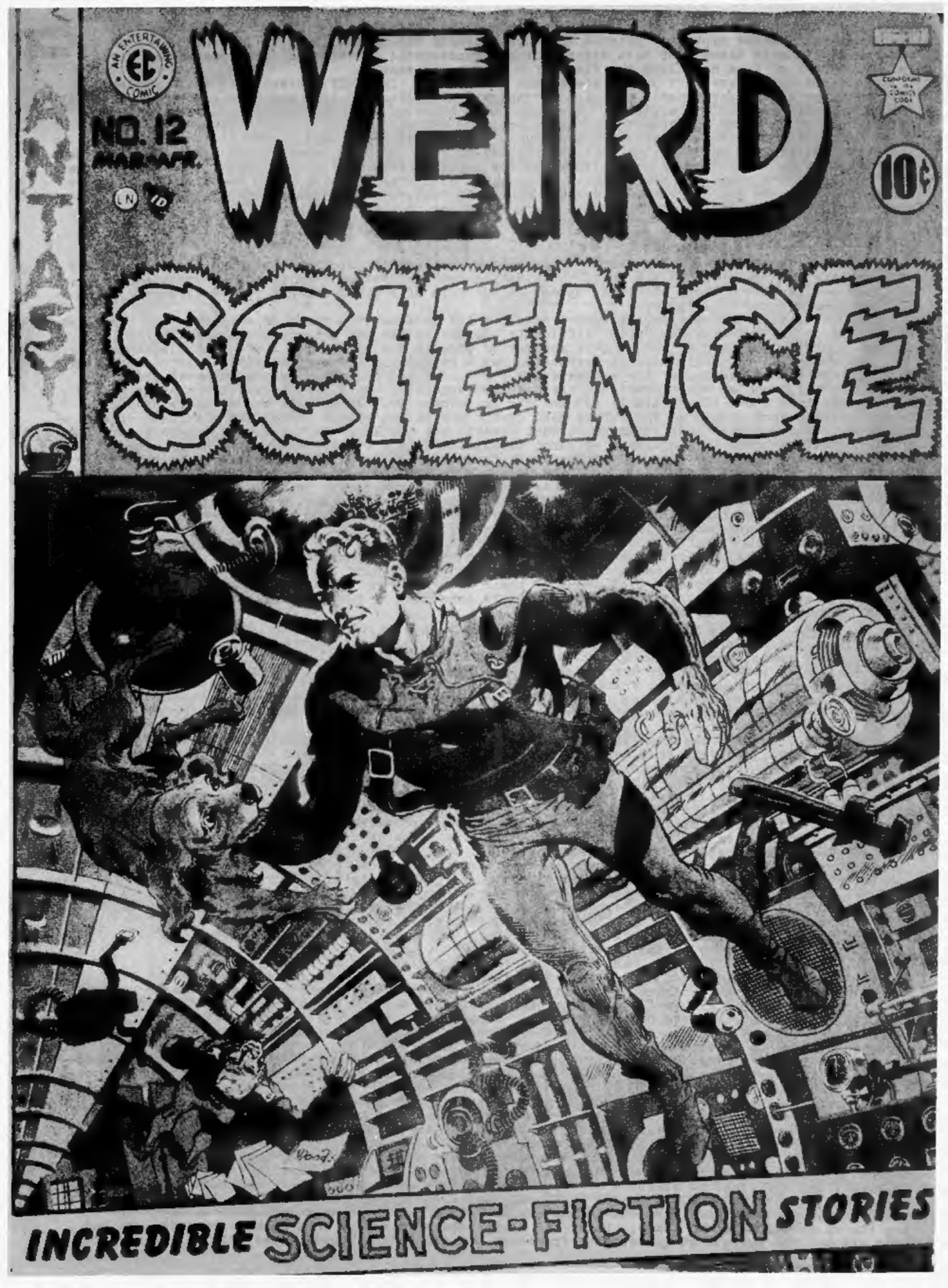
Of the original thirty-seven artists who staffed pre-trend offices during that period, only nine eventually remained and of those just five retained permanent seats at the drawing boards. Those five were Al Feldstein who went on to become managing editor of all the new titles, Johnny Craig who absorbed the greater portion of the artistic evolution, Graham Ingels a featured brush man in the passe' GUNFIGHTER, Jack Kaman and Wallace Wood. As time went by it was evident that Craig's style had changed the least because even at that early date, his technique set the pattern of fine craftmanship the EC come became identified with. Kamen although famous for his comic female anatomy, was one of the lesser outstanding panel men and Wood was in mere infancy in those early days when he doubled up with Harrison. Ingels of course cannot be denied the special flair his approach lent the horror mags but he, like Kamen and Wood, had a long way to go before he would catch up to Craig. It might be said that eventually Wood ripened most, in the shortest span of time. really maturing into a phenomena of artistic talent. Harrison, on the other hand, was one of the nine who was not to survive the new movement.

Inevitably EC began to attract fresh talent that began to transform a glistening jewel into a dazzling diamond necklace. With Feldstein at the helm of the EC figate, the crew sailed a steady course the uncertain waves of competition. Harvey Kurtzman, using his inventive style as a blanket to cover the possibility of introduction had stopped in one morning to sugar the coffee of the EC cup with the teaspoon of his humor. The visit became a stay that eventually resulted in an editorialship of two new titles. The editors felt since CRIME SUSPENSE having rainbowed from....HORROR into such a pot of gold, the spell was strong enough to resist the tug of chance. HAUNT OF FEAR was turned over to the little "detective of detail," as he was later known, and although HAUNT OF FEAR was re-numbered and continued as a featured titled what should have been an old issue #18 became the infant issue of TWO FISTED TALES. This was quickly twinned with FRONTLINE COMBAT in July of '51 which, devoted exclusively to tales of the same, enjoyed tremendous success with it's authentic tales of the Korean War. Later, although TWO FISTED TALES had not begun as a strict war yarn, it too revised its theme primarily around battle. With the inclusion of painfully authenticated research, both mags became articulate reports which, in some cases,of their "historical" reproductions might very well served as pictorial supplements to a variety of text books.

By now THE CRYPT OF TERROR had sinced changed clothes into a new title and was sporting a natty TALES FROM THE CRYPT jacket. Craig finished one more cover for that mag and then devoted the turn of his pen to those of VAULT OF HORROR, the only book, by the way, that was cover drawn by one artist. Then just about mid-way in '51 a new name fell into the EC lineup, his work first appearing inside the covers of TALES FROM THE CRYPT. There was no mistaking that the fellows at 225 Lafayette Street had done it again. His fresh style and bold new approach immediately

captured the fanfare of EC's growing audience so by the 13th issue (#29 because of the re-numbering system) he had moved up to jacket designer where he remained the key that opened the cover door of every succeeding issue. Obviously to those of us who were EC fans that fellow was none other than joltin' Jack Davis. A nefarious magician who sprinkled his horror sorcery with a humor that often insinuated satire, Davis tickled even the most grotesque with a feather of pleasant absurdity that did by the very wit of his method, fence within the boundary of good taste. ,even a plot that bubbled in the sauce of a gruesome gravy. His lugubrious travestry was then subtly salted product of his desire to neutralize the viewers shock and Jack, the satanous satirist quickly became a welcome step up the long flight to the top.

While Jack was re-drawing apocalyptic history, the EC roundtable dealt another card from the deck and doubled CRIME SUSPENSE into a twin-barreled blockbuster by coupling it with SHOCK SUSPENSE hitting the stands in February of 1952. Anyone immediately recognized by the repetitive success of the EC comic line, that I.C. Publishing had not only been correct in their assumption of rag weavery among the cloth of quality but that the fans, young as they were, had correctly evaluated this condition. Possibly the only thing I.C. had not recognized was its wide acceptance into the ranks of adults as well as children. This in time necesitated or rather provided the means for editors Gaines, Feldstein, Kurtzman and later Craig, to compose some of the finest comic prose that had ever honored the newstands. Classical epilogues


AN ENTERTAINING COMIC
EC
NO. 12
MAR.-APR.
10¢
WEIRD
SCIENCE
INCREDIBLE SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES

acclaimed throughout the country by father and son alike, exampled in "...So Shall Ye Reap", "In Gratitude" and "Blood Brothers" printed in SHOCK SUSPENSE #10,11 and 13, were literary pyramids that towered over a vast dessert of mass discretion and fundemental subterfuge. It appeared the first, faint snowfall of fame had blown the flake of EC into a blizzard.

More and more passengers jumped aboard the EC express. In SHOCK SUSPENSE #13 while applause resounded for Wood's performance in "Blood Brothers," Al Williamson took his bows on the stage amidst tumultuous approval from the audience. Simultaneously in unison with the gathering of laurels, October of 1952 saw the announcement of a new addition to the family. It was what the editors promised, going to be a "comic" comic. Naturally it would still retain all the EC high tradition but its pictorial shelves would be loaded with original twists. To many concerned it hardly seemed possible that the gang at EC could add anything to the great library they already boasted but then, after much secrecy, late that same month another classic hatched. MAD had arrived! Overnight the country was taken by frenzy and everyone, everywhere was going "MAD." Harvey Kurtzman's welcome little monster superceeded all 'funny' funnybooks and a new concept in humor was forged in the bellows at EC. The royal rollcall now read: THE VAULT OF HORROR, TALES FROM THE CRYPT, THE HAUNT OF FEAR, WEIRD SCIENCE, WEIRD FANTASY, TWO FISTED TALES, FRONTLINE COMBAT, CRIME SUSPENSE, SHOCK SUSPENSE, and now MAD.

In three short years EC had stepped from behind the curtain into the limelight, taken the tiger of notoriety and shaken it by the tail. Cultivation had transformed them from an inspiration into an idiom and despite a short editorial appeal in the form of a thank you for past public patronage, EC continued to burn full furnace.

In the melting pot outside, the market had lost its balance in a flood of more than 500 competitive titles. The industry was having difficulty supporting its own weight, complicated by an ominous rumbling that was as yet, a mere whisper of doom in the eardrum of comic book giantdom.

Meanwhile, EC was sustaining its reputation as a formidable foe on the battlefield of challenge. Never before in the history of the contemporary cartoonist had any organization gathered under a single rooftop, such an encyclopedia of brilliant personality. With each successive chapter EC had spun itself into a web of unbeatable originality and dimension. Along with the witchery of Jack Davis, Wallace Wood stretched the rubber band of his anatomical genius across the slingshot of an introspective mind that could propel his dormant, docile bow and arrow ranged in and out of his boundless brackets. A wizard of panel panavision Wood's frames, stuffed at every angle with intense incident and item, literally bulged with fantastic content. His masterpieces in "There'll Be Some Changes Made" (WS #14/'52), and "The Desert Fox" (FLC #3) and "Light Brigade" in the following issue of the same title, bordered sheer disbelief so exciting were his talented portrayals. Wallace Wood was truly the modern day Michaelangelo of the comic book renaissence.

A very witty guy named Elder was, at the very time Wood was molding his statues in ink, running wild through the playground of MAD, paralyzing his loony fans with such tranquilizers as the unslightful "Mole" (MAD #2) of dig, dig, dig fame. Indeed though Kurtzman had breathed the first life into the mouth of than manical digest, to many it was Elder's buffoonery with which the name Mad became synnnmous. Kurtzman's mania for precision on the other hand had bred an army of staunch admirers who probably spent the best years of their lives staring patiently through the glass of some huge reading device, trying in vain to capture some flaw in Harvey's infinitesimal diligence. It was incredible how very few they found.

While the satirhole MAD was re-making comic book burlesque, Graham Ingels the 'Ghastly' one was having a halloween with his grissly tales from the bubbling pot-pourri of the horror caldrons. Besides their names, many of the artiste shared their pictorial transcripts with fastidious attention to detail that overlooked the realm of addicted norm. Ingels was possibly the formost of any in his masterful transmutation of natural perspective into the insidious validity of the grotesque. The really amazing quality of the bizzare' approach he employed to successfully induce a connected value between the completely unrelated and the veritable. His mode was certainly worthy of his pseudonym, "Ghastly."

Severin and Elder, the 'dynamic duo' of the pen and pencil set, had brought both war magazines a digestive authenticity no free form media had witnessed in ten years and while editing had forced Feldstein to switch from India ink to typewriter ribbon, the science-fic ticker-tapes were far from in trouble with grey-flannel boys like Williamson and Orlando rocketing the stock. Jack Davis had diverted a small portion of his abundant talent to MAD and this, coupled with his horrorific efforts of early TALES FROM THE CRYPT fame, really poured the champagne of recognition into the glass of his wit that spilled itself into the little fooler's zany chambers. Artist and author alike probed the very mind of the printer's ink in the desire to fulfill ever at birth's perpetual, healthy offspring. The "Vault Keeper", Reaper, Crypt Keeper, "Old Witch" all had grown from after-thoughts into important characters who became the personification of identity between book and fan. Their stories had carried the message of the EC tradition to practically every corner of the continent and they became as well loved in their time as Huckleberry Finn was in his.

The EC child itself, having been successfully delivered, was then raised through various environmental stages of sagacity and intense proficiency. The excruciating complexity of each new born "slick", breached all walls of previous conformity and subject matter, technique and illustration were always absolute in their application.

This, perhaps with its disregard for convention, decreased the problems of working within the limited borders of a two dimensional perimeter. In an entirely different retrospect the artful device of subordinating the ability to cultivate the reader's preference became obvious to only a minority of critical fans. One perfect example was the false conclusion that by comparison, an EC comic appeared to be a portfolio of exceedingly greater virtues and exceedingly fewer pages. This undoubtedly heated the element of magnanious debate first because of its former asset and secondly due to a pertinent revelation about its form.

If a person should take the time to investigate facets he concluded that competitive analogues usually boasted theirs to be "fifty-two page giants". In comparison to EC, which rarely contain many more than thirty-six, they seemed to favorably outrank them by an impractical margin of sixteen pages! However, upon examination of both particulars, there was an obligation to weigh the following ounces of facts. Opponents regarded the front and back covers as not two pages but FOUR, one for each side, whereas EC regarded neither as anything more than a front and back cover. Likewise, the fifty-two page Atlas had now been reduced to a forty-eight paper stature of less gigantic proportion. Usually a comic was punctuated with what was commonly known as a "house" ad augmented by the periodic paid ads, which helped support the advertising diet of the book. EC restricted the flagrant over-use of "house" propoganda and the abuse of more than ONE paid, page ad which more often found itself on the back cover. Similar books not only did not restrict their ads to the numerical denomination of one but often packed as many as TWELVE between the binding of those "massive" texts. Under the microscope of scrutiny this conclusive anthology not only exposed the aggravated quantity of framework but did in truth reduce the original posture of

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
by Williamson & Mayer
THE SHIP CAME OUT OF THE BLACK NIGHT SPITTING FIRE... AND GROCK KNEW AN EAGERNESS ALMOST UNBEARABLE IN ITS INTENSITY. THE PLANET RUSTLED AND WAITED. IT HAD WAITED SO LONG... BUT NOW, THE WAITING WAS OVER. THEY WERE RETURNING! THEY RODE WITHIN THE ALLOY BOWELS OF THE ROCKET. THEY WERE COMING BACK, AT LAST! MEN!
THE ROCKET SPEWED FLAME, SETTLED. IN HIS EAGERNESS, GROCK SENT HIS MIND QUESTING THROUGH ITS METAL... YES! THE MEN WERE THERE...
WHEW! I'VE SEEN ALL KINDS, CAPTAIN, BUT I GUESS OLD MOTHER NATURE REALLY OUTDID HERSELF HERE!
STRANGE PLANET, STRANGE LIFE FORMS. YOU'RE A BIOLOGIST, MASON! YOU KNOW THAT?

the book to that of a hunched caricature when compared to the amplitude of an EC glossary. The midget that remained was hardly the focal point of the tasteful majority nor the demand of the discriminating addict.

The additional feature of thoughtful blending of detail and color, pulp which didn't fray the moment a page was turned and the bonus of an informative biography of each artist capped with his photograph on the reverse side of the title page, labeled EC an astounding product of the imagination. No other comic cared to relinquish such valuable space to familiarize the reader with the clockwork of its timepiece since ads, in lieu of 'fads', were much more profitable.

In the catagory of technigal vocabulary, EC was instrumental in capitalizing many letters in the badly disregarded alphabet of comic language. They practically pioneered what could be called the 'relative' caption as well as expediting the initial, shallow characteristics of the panel 'balloon'. Most of us are familiar with the term, caption, and in the knowledge that in many instances it did little more than signature proof of expressions once the story fell out rolling. More often it appeared to be a direct attempt to fill gaping space that could not be artistically accounted for. EC not only developed the caption to an unimpeachable portion of the story anatomy, but filled them with such an abundance of informative pre-dialogue, the editors printed a reccomendation each reader pay close attention to the frame in its entirity or pay the penalty of losing the plot. This also discouraged the illiterate abuse of evaluating merely the picture without first considering the script. In the same area, the space occupied by the panel balloon, was a veritable dictionary of dialogue that added a needed glossary of words to color. In a summary, both these attributes were incorporated into a highly developed method of picture alignment.

Rival comic w frames often formed the bad habit of becoming so confusing in their delineation that in order to re-capture the trail of the readers' mind, it became optional to insert little reminders that re-routed the straggling eyesight into the next panel with the aid of tiny arrows or dotted lines. This not only frustrated the continuity of the story, but badly destroyed the fluidity of the page in its entirity. EC panels therefore were printed in balanced boxes, neatly lined into rows that allowed the reader to focus his attention on all the details without the insistant deviation of eye from page.

To further augment their ambitious cirriculum, EC invited some of the most outstanding writers in the business to flavor their forte'. In addition to the adept talents of Feldstein, Kurtzman, and Craig, such guests as Ewndo Binder (really two writers using a pseudonym), Guy de Mauspassant and Ray Bradbury became featured writers in many of the EC horror and science fiction "glossies." The impact of Bradbury's work, combined with the expressive interpretations of Orlando, Ingels, Williamson and Wood, was to chisel forever a monument to his work in the minds of his readers. As if this in itself wasn't sufficient, the downtown gang also managed to give some of Edgar Allen Poe's classics some original, classical twists. Alternately in story structure, that became the product of razor sharp minds honed into the cutlery of audacious individualism, experiments where the machinery of many components, the construction of many minds. With the introduction of their "Quickies" tales, EC developed a paradoxical masterpiece with double twist endings which enjoyed great success due to its provoking capitol command with the reader. These Quickies, as they were titled, initiated the rendering of one plot followed by a duplicate, simulating each other in identical donspiracy, yet concluding in an entirely opposite possibility of olimax. In the theatre of the comic-goer it projected aw fresh, divariocate theme onto the screen of his mind.

Every enterprise contained that undeniable combination of research, detail, plot and conclusion that permitted EC the perogative of boasting a 'depth of field that since, in the re-incarnation of such tradition into numerous forms of present day comic-lore, has spoken for itself.

Elsewhere a hammer was sounding, striking an ominous ring against the bell of public opinion. Comic titles began to fall like leaves on an autumn day, blown from their branches by the winds of bureaucracy. One by one, book upon book toppled helplessly into sad graves for no funeral is ever a happy one; not even that of a comic book. Yet, even though many companies were blowing themselves into the handkerchief of self imposed censorship, it was more than a simple case of sniffles that was giving the industry a running nose. There was an external virus pumping the veins full of failure. So fatal was the infection to become that even EC,although thoroughly innoculated against the spread of disease, lost the quality of their comic children, a small sting was enough to cause the demise of both WEIRD SCIENCE and WEIRD FANTASY in November of 1953.

In issue 22 of WEIRD SCIENCE, there appeared a testimony regratably commemorating the shortlived career. In requiem the editors explained that for a period of almost 18 months, both prints had finished in the red. The combined losses figured to be approximately $15,000; too much of a w loss to encourage continuation. So, having been brought to their knees by what the editors described as... "not enough discerning science-fiction readers in the country to support a high print s-f mag..." the two maiden science yarns capitol command. In their defunct biomothlies, the editors proposed a new endevor combining the double virtues of the deceased under the singular, split-level title of WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY. The quality would remain of high caliber but in order to cut print costs to a practical margin, Gaines and Feldstein felt that an increase in price to 15¢ would, while not defeating the budget of the reader, enable them to balence theirs. Unfortunately the theory did not substantiate the application. Hardly two issues had reached the stands then the editors were forced to announce the tariff because of decline in sales. It was a stunning lesson and a bitter dose of medicine to swallow. It might have been compared to the breading of a rare flower nourished with the purest of soil and water, protected from the harsh elements of triteness, kept from strangling in a thicket of weeds; then discovering one day someone had picked it and tossed it carelessly into the refuge. EC had kept all the gardens of their comics well groomed while others had allowed theirs to grow seedy and ragged. Still, regardless of their beauty or lack of it, second bests were still winning medals. Nevertheless, while the defeat of circumstance was mere a lemon-drop of criticism, the untold comic titles slew rendered in the streets of economic disaster. EC licked her wounds of remorse, patching the broken pieces and,if anything,growing strong from the strength of experience.

The formula of success was a closely guarded virtue and during the peak of her career, EC employed no less than 31 artists, at one time or another, besides an ocean of literary material. Among the creditials, in addition to those mentioned, were such greats as George Evans, Angelo Torres, Alexander Toth, Russ Heath and Bernie Krigstein,to name a few. So now echoed through the pages of ten titles into which the finest names in the field added a taste of honey to the buzzing comicomb. The trend had become a tradition that enfolded a continent in its arms; the world its stage, the comic book its theatre.

Ironically, with the armistice in Korea, shortly before the turn of '54, FRONTLINE COMBAT became a victim of circumstance. In patterning itself the adventures of our fighting GI's, it had type cast itself and, although it outranked every other battle banner on the stands, possibly because it did not wrap the repulsive fields of an alien hero, that epithet fell to a final resting place beneath a fresh grave in the EC cemetary. Its companion, TWO FISTED TALES, was still to

strongly entrenched on the battlefield to suffer defeat quite yet, although it too, in an effort to survive the blistering barrage of political execution, modified its format in the last issues becoming the NEW TWO FISTED TALES. Hardly had the gathered shawls that mourned the passing paid their final respects did the curtain of fate lift the final act on the tragedy.

In Chicago the Southtown Economist had begun an intensive campaign against the so called "smut" of children's comic books that was to last for 8 weeks as a front page article. In an article entitled "The Young Criminals" in 1948, Dr. Fredric Wertham of Lafayette Clinic, New York, claimed that a certain product of suggestive stimulation that could be the encouraging chemical basis of juvenile delinquency. TIME magazine sequeled Lippman's effixy with another pre-meditated article called "Terror on the Newstands," the inflential reflection of an apparent distaste for the chambers of the comic book characteristics. Probably one of the most destructive offenses launched was initiated by THE HARTFORD COURANT in a series of articles and editorials that began by pricking the cheeks of the comic industry and ended by practically choking it to death. With the censorship reaction of public opinion Connecticut courant threw the whole industry until its face turned purple in vain effort to gasp a breath or re-buttel. It must be remembered that at this time Connecticut was responsible for the printing of almost 40% of all comic books in America, which made the Hartford paper a notable adversary. And, due to it, among the short of breath were the burning throats of the editors at EC.

The final nail was hammered into the coffin by Dr. Frederic Wertham who had, since 1948, been an industrious crusader against the adversary. In 1953 Rhinehart & Company Inc. published a 397 page hardcover entitled SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT which they claimed was the most shocking books in years. Its arrival was well timed and the book was an effective bottle that contained a huge dose of anti-comicism, served in small spoonfulls of what appeared to be critical and valid attestation. It was an epic in true Kinsey fashion but instead of exploring sex it permeated the influence of comic book on youths. Undoubtedly the book was the most thorough of its kind; it had to be to have caused the evolution/revolution it eventually did. A masterpiece of intense origin, the critique rested on a psycological platform that encompassed a flood of formal and theoretical possibility. Dr. Wertham himself, a well seasoned psychiatrist who had worked in clinics at Bellvue, Queens Hospital Center, etc., had not embarked upon his investigation without careful preparation nor had he come without great recommendation. It would also have been ridiculous to assume because of these very attributes and the seven years it took to compile the book, that he did not fully believe in his "theories." Furthermore, no one could prove anything to the contrary. Not even the editors of I.C. Publishing Co., who were to become a primary targets of Dr. Wertham.

What exactly lines the motivation of this lobbyist-turned his theory into public orbit? In essence Dr. Wertham believed that since comics embraced such an immense media they were liable to become malignant if they bred corruption in the minds and morals of those who read them. He felt that quite often juvenile manifestations could spawn from ideological fantasies children extracted from these books. It was quite possible that the fictiolous characters portraved might become so influential to the reader they were apt to provide the source for underlying motivations of later psycological distortion. The comic in Wertham's mind was a solitoud diest of fraudulent frolic implicated the belief that in many cases comic books not only deviated from the accepted norm of morals but intensified the abnormal or subnormal. So the comic was condemned for the destruction of a a fantasy which should have been confined to dreams.

The validity of all Dr. Wertham's accusations of course rested on the belief that adolescents were capable of separating these subconscious tattle tales from the concious fairy tales and storing them for later psycological nourishment. It would appear that an assumption involving such symbolism being comprehended by the basicly unspoiled mind, was rather far fetched. In comparison, the adult had been "conditioned" to the reflex of reality and was more liable to introduce isolated values into surface meanings that held no subconscious relavancy to the normal child. Those children who used comics as a springboard to release deliquent inhibitions were doing so not as an adventure INTO fantasy but as an escape FROM it in as much that they identified these fantasia with their own reality. In my opinion, blaming comic books, for the malacious discharge of wild children was like blaming the bible for the sins of humanity.

But rather than parry with dogmatic thrusts of vocabulary and realizing the obstacle the non-reader encountered attempting to identify with the stories, the actual comic book itself was submitted as the greatest example of outraged committed against the mind of the unsuspecting adolescent. Wertham and all his allies were finally given the opportunity to become the united voices of public discipline, speaking through the lips of the Senate Committee to investigate the link of juvenile delinquency to the chain of conduture that began in 1954. Among the speakers for the defense of the comic book was William M. Gaines, speaking on behalf of his defendant, the EC comic.

Unfortunately, at this late date the Tired EC protagonist was badly beaten from the constant pummeling of his many adversaries. Gaines should have realized his only defense were the books themselves and many were used to beat him to ruin because of their obvious disregard for purpose and exaggerated use of shock value without thought of consequence. CRIME SUSPENSE #22 was a prime exhibit for the prosecution, as well as CRIME SUSPENSE #20, MAD #10, and texts from SHOCK SUSPENSE #4, which had examined the fate of a man convicted and executed for a crime that he did not commit. The conviction of an innocent man for murder he did not commit. HAUNT OF FEAR #19 really dropped the guillotine into the final panel of a gore story entitled "Poul Play." Fabricated around a thin plot of revenge and justice, it climaxed with the dismembered body of a baseball pitcher strung all over the diamond. Many conclusions were drawn, the strongest being the poor exercise of a "plotless" plot, developed merely with the principal intention of opening an avenue of conclusive revulsion and the resultant profits. Gaines admitted that the horror comics had regretably become the necessary drawing card to insure survival. Gaines' readily admitted his intention to guarantee a profit since that he ascertained was the purpose of every business. He also felt that he had retained a dignity within his comics that other firms had lost long before or had, in truth, never embraced. It was his feeling that the public had the right to be exposed to other possibilities of virtue besides the colloquial expedient of good always conquering evil. Perhaps it would have been wiser for him to explain that maintaining an epic standard on the best seller list for almost four years, had done little more than to boost EC than had the lack of that virtue in comparison to the harsh light of public ankles. Perhaps it would have been better had he asked about the prudence in condemning the once great with the mediocrity of small or no distinction. In truth, there first cinder that had crept into the eye of EC was not the dirt of defalcation but the particle of strained insight which soon confused its own thoughts with intricate plots that bogged down the readers' movements. EC had let the "exit" of childhood captivity become a barrier of psycological geometry that saddled the pony of a child's mind. There was no objection to opaque under-currents while they in themselves did not become the subjective adjectives, but once the art lost its balance on the highwire of the script, the comic lost its role as an entertainer. This reasoning did not insinuate the transformation of the EC follower into an anti-intellectualist but it did hint that a great majority of the following were just kids looking for an escape FROM homework, not a substitute for it. They wanted no prognosis of their escape hatch only the desire to jump out into a

fantasy that offered the maximum relaxation and the minimum of intense logic. Ironic that perfection had bred persecution.

Even while the bells of publicity rang with the name of EC throughout the hallowed halls of justice there was an attempt to graft new life to the dying patient and from beneath the scarred tissue, new pulse began to stir. PANIC had been heralded as another classic in humor by sincere fans who, in spite of everything, still carried the EC banner, and, as if in accordance with the natural trend of things, it was immediately banned in Boston for its lampooning the holiday poem, "The Night Before Christmas." But PANIC survived the bittersweet noteriety and was still around when, as if in preparation for the new order, PIRACY the last "New Trend" (or the first "New Direction" as some would believe) hit the comic plazas of the nation.

But the dust had been gathering in the corners of its meaning and now as title after title, company after company, fell, EC realized the ~~it~~ industry had written its own epitaph. The outcry of indignation was a hollow echo now but in the wake of disaster the EC obituaries read; HAUNT OF FEAR died December 1954, SHOCK SUSPENSE died December 1954, VAULT OF HORROR died December 1954. On the headstone of that last issue there appeared a special appeal asking the readers to refute the soapbox stampede of the minority who in the editor's opinion comprised a small fraction of those people who cared about comics and probably a smaller decimal of those who actually read them. Even at that doomed hour, the gang at EC searched for response knowing the falling pebbles of condemnation had become a landside; an avalanche that soon smothered any last breaths of hope.

Only TALES FROM THE CRYPT, CRIME SUSPENSE, TWO FISTED TALES, WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY, PANIC, PIRACY, and MAD remained and little was left of the original crew or the original idea. PANIC and PIRACY died before puberty, PANIC because it WAS an imitator and PIRACY because it ~~was~~ imitated nothing anyone connected EC with. The purpose had faded like a desert mirage and the reknown EC comic had lost most of its character. The story lines had thinned to a trickle of garish cliches' and the last few drops of life fell sadly from the blood dry panels.

The final death throes began in December of 1955 with the collapse of TWO FISTED TALES, CRIME SUSPENSE, WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY and TALES FROM THE CRYPT. MAD was discontinued as a comic to escape the eraser of the new comic code to begin a long, successful career as a magazine; it would do so without the assistance of its creator, Harvey Kurtzman, who was to leave after just a few more issues. In a final exasperating attempt, WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY was re-re-converted into stilll another sci-fic title called INCREDIBLE SCIENCE FICTION. Inevitably in January of 1956 nothing remained but the memory.

Although EC was to prolong its untimely passing with the introduction of their "New Direction", they had come at last to the requiem of their existance. The world of EC had collided with the comet of convention and had all but been destroyed in the collision. Five fantastic years and an eternity of brainchildren had shrunken into an hourglass of fate while the dust of posteriety gathered in cobwebs across the empty desks in the once bustling, downtown bullpen. The tradition that EC had pioneered though after all made of clay was to someday be monumented in bronze. While tommorrow dispelled any hope of kindness, the yesterday EC had shared with us had been an important page in the diary of our lives. Even now, 15 years later, EC remembers so much of our youth to us, nothing could disparge its reign. So in humble homage we re-live our vanquished memories in the pages of collectors' books, lauding with heartfelt apathy the end of an era. Ironic like all things, it should mean more to us now that it is gone, than yesterday when it was ours for the asking.

THE EC "ARTIST OF THE ISSUE" ■ WALLACE WOOD

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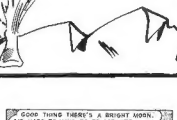

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